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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that artists be involved in the international and governmental decision making, planning, and regulating activities associated with new communication systems and communication technologies. Eight projects sponsored by Experiments in Art and Technology illustrate artists' interest in, and ability to contribute to, a variety of technical, procedural, and design problems associated with communication. (AA)

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THE ARTISTS' EXPERTISE FOR COMMUNICATION PLANNING

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"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY International Institute of Communications TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

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THE ARTIST'S EXPERTISE FOR COMMUNICATION PLANNING

I. PROPOSITION

The design problems of the interface between the individual and the communication systems claims our attention as old broadcast structures are being re-evaluated, new technologies generate new communication systems and communication technologies are being introduced into developing countries. This paper suggests that an effective way to develop a well-designed interface between the individual and the new systems and structures is for artists to participate in the international and governmental decision making, planning, and regulating activities associated with systems design, deployment and regulations. The artist has a relevant contribution to make in achieving communication systems that are better suited to human needs. His expertise is a resource that should not be ignored. In referring to an artist, I mean independent artists who work in any field--painters, sculptors, choreographers, composers, poets, writers, performance artists, etc. This proposition is derived from the experience of Experiments in Art and Technologyin its interaction with artists in the 1960's and '70's.

II. EXPERIMENTS IN ART AND TECHNOLOGY

Experiments in Art and Technology was founded in 1966 by artists and engineers to support the artists in their desire to use new materials and the processes of the new technology. E.A.T. has assisted thousands

of artists around the world with their technical problems and has initiated and administered a large number of collaborative projects involving artists with engineers and scientists and other professionals. These collaborations took place in non-art areas as well as in situations where technology was used to create works of art or integrated into theater performances. Many of these collaborative projects involved television and other modes of communication. In some of these projects systems configurations were evolved in answer to specific requirements or to fit specific situations; in others the aim was to develop specific programming material for existing systems. A short review of some of these projects follows. In addition to the projects, this paper will also discuss some proposals for funding agencies that E.A.T. has developed since they provide examples of what can be produced when artists collaborate with scientists and other professionals on specific problems.

III. THE EXPERTISE OF THE ARTIST

Before going on to the illustrative examples, the paper will discuss the capabilities of the artist which we have identified over the years and which are the expertise he brings to the collaboration with other professionals.

The artist deals with materials and physical situations in a straightforward manner. He does not limit himself to the generally accepted function of the object or situation, nor does he assign a hierarchy of value to any material. The development of painting and assemblage

in this century from Picasso to Rauschenberg illustrates this quality very well.

He achieves the maximum effect with minimum means. It is intrinsic to the good artists work that it makes the most efficient use of the materials. Surplus of material leads to decorative work, and the artist abhors decoration.

The artist is sensitive to the presence, in a given situation, of generally unnoticed esthetic assumptions and decisions. Esthetic decisions and assumptions are based on personal preferences and judgments rather than on practical, economic, social or human factors. The artist is professionally trained to recognize esthetic choices and most artists have the ability to transfer this training to non-art situations and can make people aware that they are expressing subkective preference.

The artist is sensitive to scale and how it affects the human being. From cave drawings to Persian miniature to Wagnerian opera to Christo's Running Fence scale has been a consistent preoccupation of the artist.

The artist has the ability to perceive different cultures. He acts as a witness to indigenous cultural forms and can reveal and describe these forms without apriori attitudes or a posteriori judgments. We have seen examples of this throughout the history of literature, but the capability of the artist opens interesting possibilities for the television medium.

The artist has to assume total responsibility for his work. The artist knows that a work is the result of his own choices and when it is finished he cannot dismiss it or make excuses that "it could have been better if..." Our experience is that the artist brings this sense of personal commitment and responsibility to areas outside his own work, giving a unique quality to his involvement in these situations.

IV. E.A.T. PROJECTS AND PROPOSALS IN COMMUNICATION-1966-1976

9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering

The first major event that E.A.T. staged was a series of performances at the 69th Regiment Armory in New York in 1977 which resulted from a collaboration between 10 artists and 40 engineers from Bell Telephone Laboratories. In "9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering," choreographers Yvonne Rainer and Lucinda Childs, composer David Tudor, and artists Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Whitman, Oyvind Fahlstrom and Alex Hay used closed-circuit television and projection as a theatrical tool.

In Robert Rauschenberg's work, "Open Score," 500 people performed simple actions on the Armory floor in total darkness lit only by infrared light. The images from infrared television cameras were projected onto three large screens facing the audience. This created for the audience the tension between unseen actors who could only be sensed and the images of the actors on the screen. Thus, Rauschenberg, who has used many image reproduction techniques--

blueprints, photography, photographic silk screens--was able to effectively integrate television hardware into his visual language. David Tudor used television in a different way by treating the projector as a giant oscilloscope to display amplitude-frequency characteristics of certain frequency bands of his music as he played the bandoneon in the highly resonant armory space.

An interesting historical footnote is that when the performances were first scheduled to take place in Stockholm, Oyvind Fahlstrom and John Cage had specific proposals to integrate the use of television channels from Early Bird or Telstar into their works. However, they settled for Oyvind Fahlstrom's telephone call to Shanghai and John Cage's 18 open telephone lines picking up sounds from all over the United States and feeding them into his concert at the Armory.

Research Laboratory in Entertainment Programming

In response to a request by RCA Laboratories to have artists work there, E.A.T. surveyed more than 50 artists in the fall of 1969 about their use of television. On the basis of the artists' interest, E.A.T. developed a proposal to RCA Laboratories to establish a research laboratory in entertainment programming: a collaborative situation in which artists would work with television research engineers, sociologists, anthropoligists, etc. to explore new forms of entertainment programming towards the creation of a more effective role for television in a wider social context. In addition it was expected that the artist's interaction with equipment and collaboration with research engineers within the context

of the RCA proposal would influence future equipment design.

Field Research Laboratories for Television Programming

In December 1969, the Nehru Institute for Development, Ahmedabad, India, invited E.A.T. to collaborate in designing and establishing a field research laboratory for developing methods of producing instructional television software for use in rural villages, in preparation for the SITE satellite television experiment. E.A.T. assembled a group of experts in television production, television equipment, experimental psychology and measurement of learning effectiveness, utilization methods, systems design and an artist. Working with their counterparts in India, the group chose as target area a buffalo dairy cooperative near Ahmedabad, and the goal was to produce material for adult instruction to improve the women's care of the buffalo.

The contribution of the artist was a system in which 1/2" video equipment was to be used in the villages to generate "visual research notes" for a script development stage. A unit equipped with 1/2" videotape recording and, playback equipment would work in a village to develop a first approximation to the instructional material. They would encourage the active participation of the villagers in generating script ideas and material and any villager would operate the equipment if he so desired. This procedure would enable villagers to become familiar with equipment and production procedures, to suggest material to be taped to perform in demonstrations and to react immediately to recorded material. In this reiterative

process the programming or instructional ideas are reviewed immediately in the village and modified according to the perceptions of the villagers. Their sensibilities are fed back into the programming material in an attempt to preserve the village idioms and correspond to the visual sensitivities of the villagers.

Based on this primary material and guided by carefully specified instructional objectives, a full production unit would produce 1- or 2-inch final instructional programs. These then would be transferred to the 1/2" format and shown in other villages for evaluation. The most valuable and innovative aspects of the project centered around the method for developing programming material for broadcast in close cooperation with local people in a village setting.

Children and Communication

In a project entitled, "Children and Communication" in 1971, two environments for children using a large tent made from theater scrim and colored lights, were set up in two different parts of New York City. They were linked by 14 dedicated telephone lines to which telephones, telex machines, electro-writers, and facsimile machines were attached. Groups of children from different parts of the city were invited to the two locations and were encouraged to use the terminal equipment to contact each other.

The project showed that children from different backgrounds and geographic locations could establish contact with each other without having to leave their own area. They were able to communicate as individuals rather than having to be part of a group reaction

to a new group of children. The environment was not programmed to teach specific skills but enabled children to use the equipment actively and creatively in a non-competitive situation. The children reacted extremely favorably to the environments and showed no fear or hesitation in using the equipment. They would teach each other how to use the machines, often giving instructions over the telephone. They devised their own rules of cooperation and determined the form and content of their written and oral communications. We found the children were greatly motivated to use writing and reading skills to communicate with other children. The project showed that such communication centers established between cooperating schools could be programmed for open communication or directed toward developing specific learning skills.

Telex: Question and Answer

In the summer of 1971 telex was used in a system which gave individuals access to information from other countries. As first suggested by Robert Whitman for an exhibition at the Sony building in Tokyo in 1968, artists from the U. S. and Japan could ask technical questions from engineers in the other country. The project was realized as "Telex: Question and Answer," E.A.T.'s contribution to an exhibition at Moderna Museet, Stockholm, called "Utopia and Visions: 1871-1981." Public telex terminals were set up in Tokyo, Ahmedabad, India, Stockholm and New York. Individuals in any of the countries could ask questions about the year 1981 to all of the other participating countries. Answers were gathered from experts or from

"man-on-the-street" interviews and the answers telexed back to the original questioner. During the month of July a total of 450 questions were transmitted and answered, which revealed the different attitudes and concerns about the future of the four very different societies. This approach to inter-cultural communication could have wider interest. Properly designed, a system using telex, information storage and unused channels would establish low-cost lines of communication between countries and cultures.

Cultural Programming For El Salvador

In February 1972, E.A.T. was asked by the Department of Culture, El Salvador, to generate a system for regional out-of-studio cultural programming as a basis for initiating a public channel and producing effective adult instructional material. El Salvador has one of the oldest and most completely developed in-school instructional television programs. Local authorities wanted to broaden this television facility to include adult instructional material and cultural programming, not all of which could originate in the studio. Resistance to this project developed on the part of the aid-giving organization that had been responsible for the investment which established an operational studio and was therefore unwilling to divert resources and personnel by going outside it. The proposal was to use low-cost portable equipment in regional centers serviced by mobile units suitable for El Salvador's terrain and geography to produce locally originated programs with broad participation of the people in the programs. Such localized television production would be responsive to the needs and interests of the

people and would reinforce El Salvador's waning cultural forms. Although E.A.T.'s proposal was not funded, the aid-giving organization submitted a similar proposal shortly after the E.A.T. team had left El Salvador.

Artist's Participation in Vocational Guidance Material

An interesting proposal was made to New York State to conduct a test project in which contemporary artists would prepare core information on the nature and quality of jobs for high school students seeking vocational guidance. Our expectation was that the artist could add realism, and insights about the physical realities of the jobs he presents. In his unique position as communicator the artist is allowed immunity in moving through levels of society and tends traditionally to be trusted as an observer. He works from his perceptions as an individual and focusses on the human components of a situation, not on social or institutional stereotypes. To evaluate these assumptions, an artist was to choose one job--brick layer, computer programmer, etc.--and document it in any form he wanted--slides, film, video, sound, writing, etc. This would be presented to students and evaluated for effectiveness in increasing understanding, variety of choice, motivation and the ability of the student to make a realistic choice. If successful, this method would be extended to produce material by artists on a full range of jobs.

U.S.A. Presents...

In "U.S.A. Presents..." E.A.T. generated a proposal for the Bicentennial of the United States: a nationwide satellite broadcast

television system programmed by the American People.

The components of the system were the following:

One or more synchronous satellite(s) in stationary orbit capable of illuminating the country from Puerto Rico to Alaska and Hawaii, which would receive and transmit a single television channel.

A single earth station uplink to the satellites with facilities for handling, storing and cataloguing all program material.

Receiving antennas for the down link located at transmission antennas for rebroadcast in the VHF or UHF bands, using existing or unoccupied channels.

For remote or isolated areas, low-cost direct-reception units would be designed to be attached directly to standard television sets.

Programs produced by the American people: individuals, community groups, special interest groups, service groups, etc.,would make films on their lives and their activities. Twenty thousand 15-25 minute Super 8mm films with sound would be broadcast 24 hours per day in a format that gives equal importance to each film.

Programming Resource Centers located throughout the country would be the community bases from which the programming groups would work. Super 8 equipment would be available through the Centers, and the staff would be responsible for maintenance, instruction advice and general coordination. People would be encouraged to participate.

Institutional advertising would provide economic support for the system. Advertisers would include local business, as well as national companies. The ads would be independent of the programming, but would be in a style consistent with it.

The system suggested its future use as a service network for the nation to provide consumer advice, medical information, education, emergency information, vocational training, etc. The drawing in Figure I illustrates the capability of the satellite system.

"U.S.A. Presents..." could have served as a national demonstration project to determine in a single effort if a broad national programming base could be created and if the local programming input

centers remaining after the project would be capable of generating a democratic television system serving people's needs. In summary it was an attempt to answer the question whether programming produced without the overlay of the assumptions, fixed esthetics and economic interests of professional broadcasting would find any public acceptance

Exterior Daylight Television Projection System

The attempt to protect film and television images in daylight outdoors or in other high-ambient light conditions has been a problem in optical design since the turn of the century. Centre Georges Pompidou, the new cultural center in Paris, wanted to display information on its facade about what was going on inside. In response to their request, we designed a system in collaboration with Ford Aerospace in Palo Alto which was capable of showing an acceptable projected 12-meter-diagonal image from an Eidophor projector to an audience of 600 people outdoors in broad daylight. The future development of these systems should have a considerable impact on the use of television for instructional purposes in developing countries as well as for sports and public events.

V. CONCLUSION

The eight projects described above show clearly the artist's interest in a variety of technical, procedural, design problems associated with communication. There are, of course, more examples of similar projects both inside and outside E.A.T. which could have been added.

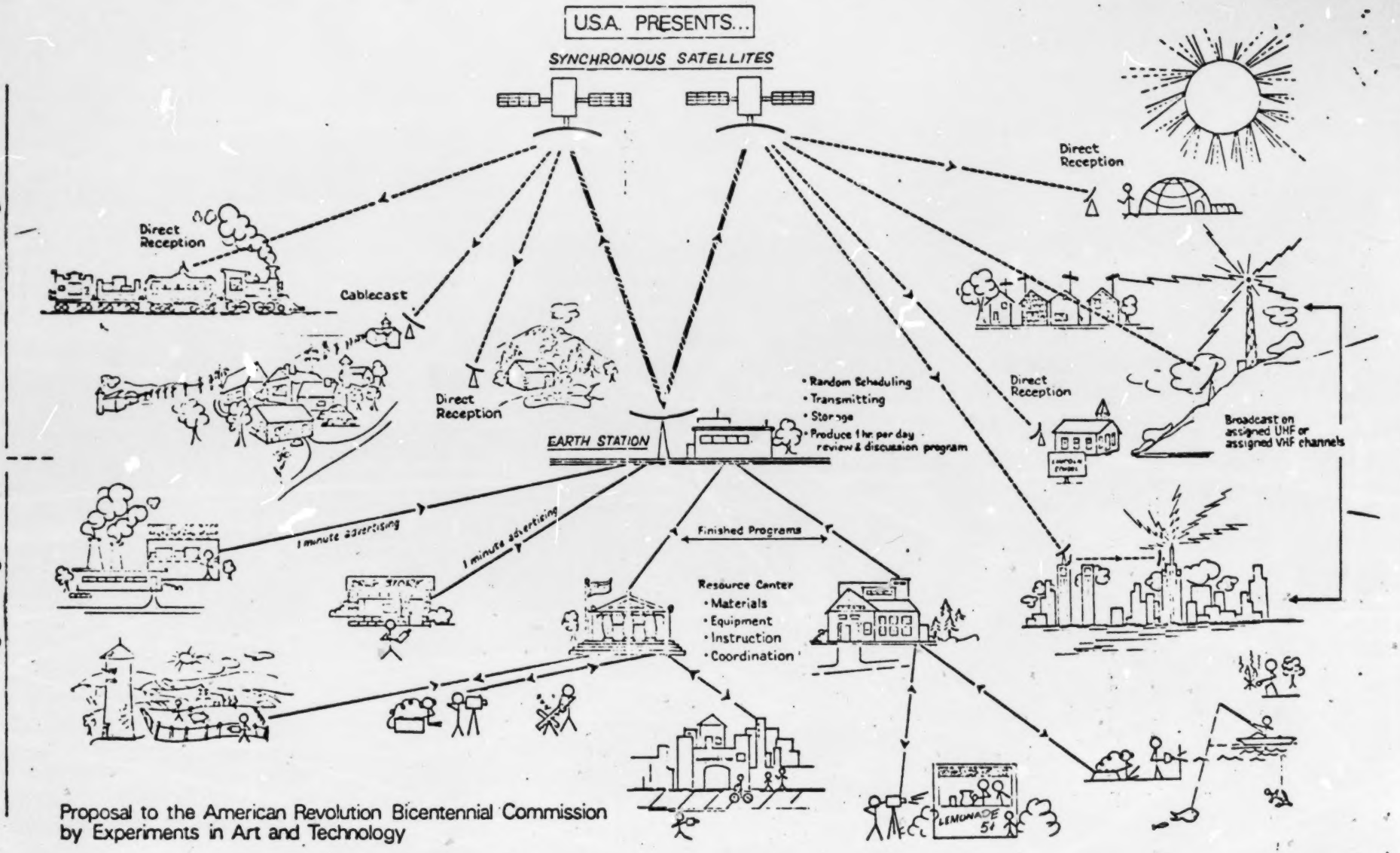
Some of the common concerns of the artist in these projects are interest in hardware design, high professional standards, cost-effective use of the hardware. Furthermore, his approach is to increase the number and variety of systems inputs and outputs and provide for the individual to communicate with other individuals.

The contemporary artist's experience with communication systems over the last 15 years and his expertise for communications planning as defined in Section III support the proposition that the artist should participate in the international and governmental decisionmaking, planning and regulatory activities associated with systems design and deployment--in ITU, within the United Nations. UNESCO, the World Bank, national aid giving organizations, national governments, non-governmental organizations, etc. It also follows that the artist should participate in the planning and execution of research and development projects as well as in studies and analyses of systems and structures.

It remains for the planners to suggest the inclusion of an artist on their teams. Given an understanding of the task on both sides, I see no problem in finding the correct artist for the job and integrating him into the situation so that he can function effectively. One might conceive of developing a manual to support this effort. Whether or not an intermediary is necessary to locate and place artists in these planning situations depends on circumstances. Feeding 10 to 15 artists into the existing national and international decisionmaking

planning and regulating structure would be a reasonable goal.

With the rapid expansion of the communication technology, decisionmaking becomes more complex and, as a friend of mine, an engineer at Bell Telephone Laboratories, expressed it, "In this situation we are all amateurs, and the artist may be the best amateur."



Proposal to the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission
by Experiments in Art and Technology

Figure 1